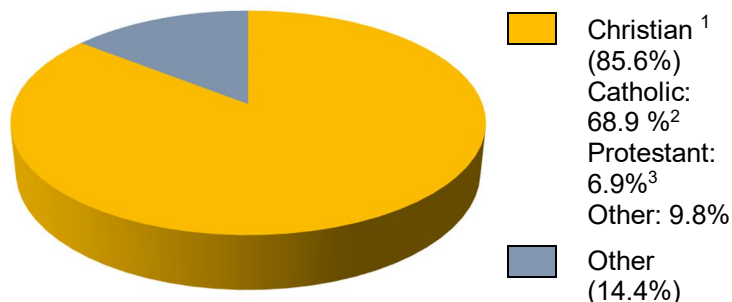


SLOVAKIA



Area: 48,845 km ²	Population: 5.4 million	Political system: Democracy	Major Language(s): Slovak
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Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution guarantees freedom of religious belief and affiliation, as well as the right to change religious faith or to be without religious beliefs. The country is not bound to any particular faith and religious groups are allowed to function independently from government interference. In order to receive the status of a legal entity, thus being able to perform economic and public religious functions, religious groups are required by the law to register.

For registration, a religious group needs at least 20,000 adult members who are either citizens or permanent residents. If a religious group has fewer members than the required threshold, it can still register as a civic association in order to be able to carry out some activities requiring a legal status.

Clergy from unregistered religious groups cannot minister to their members in prisons or government hospitals, and weddings conducted by unregistered religious groups are not legally valid. Additionally, unregistered groups cannot establish religious schools.

A concordat with the Holy See regulated legal questions between the Slovak government and the Catholic Church.

Incidents

In September 2014 in the city of Cadca, a Catholic priest, Emil Floris, suggested during a sermon that Jews themselves were to blame for inciting anti-Semitism. He further added that the World War II-era fascist Slovak state, being a German satellite, was helpless to prevent the mass deportation of Jews from the country. While the leadership of the Catholic Church in Slovakia called Floris' statements inappropriate, they refused to clearly condemn Jozef Tiso, a Catholic priest who served as the President of the World War II-era fascist Slovak state and agreed to the deportations.⁴

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

Religious freedom is generally respected in Slovakia. The Freedom House report for 2015 remarks that because of the registration prerequisite of having at least 20,000 members, some smaller religious communities such as the Muslim minority do not enjoy the possibility of claiming

government benefits.⁵

While the number of incidents remains very low, there is a growing tendency of anti-Muslim sentiments in society. The Islamic Foundation in Slovakia criticised Prime Minister Robert Fico for his post-election statements that Islam does not belong to Slovakia.⁶ Before that the Slovak government argued that Muslim immigrants would not feel welcome in Slovakia because of the lack of mosques and other Muslim institutions. Furthermore it stressed that for most immigrants, Slovakia is just a transit land to Germany and other countries and not a desired destination, and thus it would be harmful for them to be required by an EU quota to stay in Slovakia against their wishes. Citing the above pragmatic reasons, the Slovak government instead declared that Christian refugees would be welcome in the country, as they would much better integrate into Slovakia's Christian culture.⁷

While international media criticised the Slovak government's stance, the move was broadly supported by the Slovak population, which re-elected Prime Minister Fico in 2016. The far-right Nationalist Party, being even more decisive on the question of anti-immigrant sentiments, gained several seats in the last elections. Opinions remain divided on whether Prime Minister Fico's use of anti-Muslim rhetoric strengthened the extreme right or if it saved his left-wing party to lose even more seats to the nationalists.⁸ A further rise of the radical right could endanger interreligious relations in the future.

¹ According to a 2011 census some 62% of the population constitute Roman Catholics

² According to a 2011 census some 62% of the population constitute Roman Catholics

³ Augsburg Lutherans

⁴ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dclid=238432#wrapper>

⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/slovakia>

⁶ <http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20173606/pm-fico-islam-has-no-place-in-slovakia.html>

⁷ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33986738>

⁸ <http://religiousreader.org/slovakia-election-neo-nazi-party-gains-fourteen-seats/>